

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA
INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)
)
)
Plaintiff,)
)
)
v.) Cause No. 1:18-cv-3903
)
)
\$42,600.00 UNITED STATES CURRENCY,)
)
)
Defendant.)

COMPLAINT OF FORFEITURE IN REM

The United States of America, by counsel, Josh J. Minkler, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana, and Eric P. Babbs, Special Assistant United States Attorney, alleges as follows:

NATURE OF THE ACTION

1. This is a civil action seeking forfeiture of certain property pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6) because the defendant property constitutes proceeds of, or is property used to facilitate, a violation of the Controlled Substances Act.

PARTIES, JURISDICTION, AND VENUE

2. The defendant property is Forty Two Thousand Six Hundred Dollars in United States Currency (“\$42,600.00 United States Currency” or “Subject Currency”) seized from the residence of Don Merritt on May 16, 2018 (Asset Identification Number 18-CBP-000372).

3. The Subject Currency was seized by the United States Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations (“DHS-HSI”). The Subject Currency is held in a government bank account in the custody of the United States Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection (“DHS-CBP”).

4. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1345 (district courts have original jurisdiction of all civil actions commenced by the United States) and § 1335 (district courts have original jurisdiction of any action for forfeiture, and action can be brought in a district in which any of the acts giving rise to the forfeiture occurred).

5. This Court has *in rem* jurisdiction over the defendant property under 28 U.S.C. § 1335(b) (forfeiture action can be brought in a district in which any of the acts giving rise to the forfeiture occurred), and Rule G(3)(b)(i) of the Supplemental Rules for Certain Admiralty and Maritime Claims and Asset Forfeiture Actions (clerk must issue a warrant to arrest property in the government's possession).

6. This Court is the appropriate venue in this matter pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1335(a) and (b), in that the forfeiture accrued in the Southern District of Indiana.

FACTS

7. In October 2010, Don Merritt ("Merritt") was convicted by his guilty plea of dealing in cocaine, a Class A felony. *State of Indiana v. Don Merritt*, Cause No. 49G20-0902-FA-024580 (Marion Superior Court). The Marion Superior Court sentenced Merritt to twenty years of incarceration. After he received credit for time served and applicable credit time, Merritt was paroled on February 19, 2018.

8. Less than three months later, on May 16, 2018, parole officers with the Indiana Department of Correction visited Merritt's residence located at 2013 N. Euclid Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46218. The officers searched the room identified as Merritt's under the authority granted them by Merritt's parole status. *See Samson v. California*, 547 U.S. 843 (2006); *Micheau v. State*, 893 N.E.2d 1053, 1060 (Ind. Ct. App. 2008) (upholding search of parolee's residence).

9. Underneath Merritt's bed and inside a black plastic bag, officers found the \$42,600.00 United States Currency. The Subject Currency was rubber-banded in thousand-dollar increments, then banded again in increments of five thousand dollars. Also in Merritt's room, officers found rolling papers and two syringes.

10. An adult family member of Merritt's gave consent for officers to search the entire home. In the basement, the search revealed a scale and a kilogram-sized plastic bag with marijuana residue or "shake" inside it.

11. An officer of the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department deputized as a Task Force Officer with DHS-HSI was called to the scene to assist the parole officers. A certified narcotics detection canine was utilized and gave a positive indication for the odor of a controlled substance on the Subject Currency.

12. Merritt was read his *Miranda* rights and made certain statements about the Subject Currency. Merritt stated that the money belonged to his girlfriend from the sale of a home. However, Merritt declined to provide his girlfriend's contact information. Merritt verbally denied ownership of the Subject Currency and signed a DHS-HSI abandonment form disclaiming any ownership of the Subject Currency. DHS-HSI seized the Subject Currency as being the proceeds of, or used to facilitate, unlawful distribution of controlled substances.

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13. The bill count of the Subject Currency showed that it was primarily in low denominations.

| Denomination | Quantity | Amount |
|---------------|----------|--------------------|
| \$5 | 108 | \$540 |
| \$10 | 157 | \$1,570 |
| \$20 | 1387 | \$27,740 |
| \$50 | 41 | \$2,050 |
| \$100 | 107 | \$10,700 |
| Total: | | \$42,600.00 |

14. Merritt has an extensive criminal history for offenses related to controlled substances. In addition to the conviction referenced in Paragraph 7, *supra*, on July 8, 2005, Merritt was convicted by his guilty plea of dealing in cocaine or a narcotic drug, a Class B felony, in *State of Indiana v. Don Merritt*, Cause No. 49G21-0410-FC-183601 (Marion Superior Court). On July 1, 2004, Merritt was convicted by his guilty plea of possession of marijuana, a Class A misdemeanor, and resisting law enforcement, a Class A misdemeanor, in *State of Indiana v. Don Merritt*, Cause No. 49G20-0312-CM-227814 (Marion Superior Court). On March 20, 2000, Merritt was convicted by his guilty plea of possession of marijuana, a Class A misdemeanor, in *State of Indiana v. Don Merritt*, Cause No. 49G14-9906-DF-100363 (Marion Superior Court).

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY

15. DHS-HSI forwarded the Subject Currency to DHS's Fines, Penalties, and Forfeitures Office, which mailed a timely seizure notice to Merritt. On August 16, 2018, Merritt, through his attorney Scott DeVries, filed a claim to the Subject Currency. Merritt's claim stated without further elaboration that his "legal interest in the property is 100%" and requested that the Subject Currency be referred for judicial action.

16. No person other than Merritt has filed a claim in the administrative forfeiture proceeding with DHS-CBP, and the time for any person to file a claim in the administrative proceeding has expired.

17. DHS-CBP referred this matter to the United States Attorney to initiate a judicial forfeiture of the Subject Currency.

PERTINENT STATUTES AND REGULATIONS

18. Under 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1), it is unlawful for any person to manufacture,

distribute, or dispense – or possess with intent to manufacture, distribute, or dispense – a controlled substance.

19. Under 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6), all moneys furnished or intended to be furnished by any person in exchange for a controlled substance, all proceeds traceable to such an exchange, and all moneys used or intended to be used to facilitate any violation of the Controlled Substances Act, including 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1), shall be subject to forfeiture to the United States and no property right shall exist in them.

20. The United States, to meet its burden under 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6), does not need to identify a specific drug transaction, but need only show a connection to some unlawful drug transaction. *United States v. Funds in the Amount of \$100,120*, 901 F.3d 758, 768 (7th Cir. 2018). The Seventh Circuit has held that a trained drug detection canine’s positive alert is probative evidence that currency was recently in contact with controlled substances. *United States v. Funds in the Amount of \$30,670*, 403 F.3d 448, 461 (7th Cir. 2005) (“An alert to currency in most circumstances would indicate that the currency is not innocently tainted, but instead tainted through contact or close proximity to illegal narcotics.”).

CLAIM FOR RELIEF

21. Based on the facts alleged above, the \$42,600.00 United States Currency is “moneys . . . furnished or intended to be furnished by any person in exchange for a controlled substance,” and/or “proceeds traceable to such an exchange,” and/or “moneys . . . used or intended to be used to facilitate any violation of [the Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. § 801 *et seq.*],” and is therefore subject to forfeiture to the United States of America pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6).

WHEREFORE, the United States prays that the Clerk of the Court issue a warrant for

arrest of the Subject Currency pursuant to Rule G(3)(b)(i) of the Supplemental Rules for Admiralty or Maritime Claims and Asset Forfeiture Actions; that due notice be given to all parties to appear and show cause why the forfeiture should not be decreed; that judgment be entered declaring the defendant property forfeited to the United States for disposition according to law; and that the United States be granted all other just and proper relief.

Respectfully submitted,

JOSH J. MINKLER
United States Attorney

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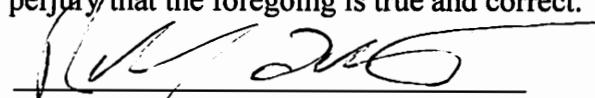
VERIFICATION

I, Robby Foster, hereby verify and declare under penalty of perjury that I am a Special Agent for Homeland Security Investigations (“HSI”), that I have read the foregoing Verified Complaint in Rem and know the contents thereof, and that the matters contained in the Complaint are true to my own knowledge, except that those matters herein stated to be alleged on information and belief, and as to those matters I believe to be true.

The sources of my knowledge and information and the grounds of my belief are the official files and records of the United States, information supplied to me by other law enforcement offices, as well as my investigation of this case, together with others, as a Special Agent with HSI.

I hereby verify and declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Dated: 11/23/18


Robby Foster
Special Agent, HSI

JS 44 (Rev. 12/12) The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

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| I. (a) PLAINTIFFS | | DEFENDANTS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>(b) County of Residence of First Listed Plaintiff _____ <i>(EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)</i></p> <p>(c) Attorneys (Firm Name, Address, and Telephone Number)</p> | | <p>County of Residence of First Listed Defendant _____ <i>(IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ONLY)</i></p> <p>NOTE: IN LAND CONDEMNATION CASES, USE THE LOCATION OF THE TRACT OF LAND INVOLVED.</p> <p>Attorneys (If Known)</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| II. BASIS OF JURISDICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only) | | III. CITIZENSHIP OF PRINCIPAL PARTIES (Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff and One Box for Defendant) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> 210 Land Condemnation <input type="checkbox"/> 220 Foreclosure <input type="checkbox"/> 230 Rent Lease & Ejectment <input type="checkbox"/> 240 Torts to Land <input type="checkbox"/> 245 Tort Product Liability <input type="checkbox"/> 290 All Other Real Property | Habeas Corpus: <input type="checkbox"/> 440 Other Civil Rights <input type="checkbox"/> 441 Voting <input type="checkbox"/> 442 Employment <input type="checkbox"/> 443 Housing/ Accommodations <input type="checkbox"/> 445 Amer. w/Disabilities - Employment <input type="checkbox"/> 446 Amer. w/Disabilities - Other <input type="checkbox"/> 448 Education | Other: <input type="checkbox"/> 463 Alien Detainee <input type="checkbox"/> 510 Motions to Vacate Sentence <input type="checkbox"/> 530 General <input type="checkbox"/> 535 Death Penalty <input type="checkbox"/> 540 Mandamus & Other <input type="checkbox"/> 550 Civil Rights <input type="checkbox"/> 555 Prison Condition <input type="checkbox"/> 560 Civil Detainee - Conditions of Confinement | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| <p>V. ORIGIN (Place an "X" in One Box Only)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> 1 Original Proceeding <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Removed from State Court <input type="checkbox"/> 3 Remanded from Appellate Court <input type="checkbox"/> 4 Reinstated or Reopened <input type="checkbox"/> 5 Transferred from Another District (specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> 6 Multidistrict Litigation</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| VI. CAUSE OF ACTION | | <p>Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you are filing (Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity): _____</p> <p>Brief description of cause: _____</p> | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT: | | <input type="checkbox"/> CHECK IF THIS IS A CLASS ACTION UNDER RULE 23, F.R.Cv.P. | DEMAND \$ _____ | CHECK YES only if demanded in complaint: JURY DEMAND: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| VIII. RELATED CASE(S) IF ANY | | <i>(See instructions):</i> JUDGE _____ DOCKET NUMBER _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| DATE _____ | | SIGNATURE OF ATTORNEY OF RECORD | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| FOR OFFICE USE ONLY | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| RECEIPT # _____ | | AMOUNT _____ | APPLYING IFP _____ | JUDGE _____ MAG. JUDGE _____ | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET FORM JS 44

Authority For Civil Cover Sheet

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and service of pleading or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. The attorney filing a case should complete the form as follows:

- I.(a) Plaintiffs-Defendants.** Enter names (last, first, middle initial) of plaintiff and defendant. If the plaintiff or defendant is a government agency, use only the full name or standard abbreviations. If the plaintiff or defendant is an official within a government agency, identify first the agency and then the official, giving both name and title.
 - (b) County of Residence.** For each civil case filed, except U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county where the first listed plaintiff resides at the time of filing. In U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county in which the first listed defendant resides at the time of filing. (NOTE: In land condemnation cases, the county of residence of the "defendant" is the location of the tract of land involved.)
 - (c) Attorneys.** Enter the firm name, address, telephone number, and attorney of record. If there are several attorneys, list them on an attachment, noting in this section "(see attachment)".
- II. Jurisdiction.** The basis of jurisdiction is set forth under Rule 8(a), F.R.Cv.P., which requires that jurisdictions be shown in pleadings. Place an "X" in one of the boxes. If there is more than one basis of jurisdiction, precedence is given in the order shown below.
 - United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here.
 - United States defendant. (2) When the plaintiff is suing the United States, its officers or agencies, place an "X" in this box.
 - Federal question. (3) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1331, where jurisdiction arises under the Constitution of the United States, an amendment to the Constitution, an act of Congress or a treaty of the United States. In cases where the U.S. is a party, the U.S. plaintiff or defendant code takes precedence, and box 1 or 2 should be marked.
 - Diversity of citizenship. (4) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1332, where parties are citizens of different states. When Box 4 is checked, the citizenship of the different parties must be checked. (See Section III below; **NOTE: federal question actions take precedence over diversity cases.**)
- III. Residence (citizenship) of Principal Parties.** This section of the JS 44 is to be completed if diversity of citizenship was indicated above. Mark this section for each principal party.
- IV. Nature of Suit.** Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If the nature of suit cannot be determined, be sure the cause of action, in Section VI below, is sufficient to enable the deputy clerk or the statistical clerk(s) in the Administrative Office to determine the nature of suit. If the cause fits more than one nature of suit, select the most definitive.
 - V. Origin.** Place an "X" in one of the six boxes.
 - Original Proceedings. (1) Cases which originate in the United States district courts.
 - Removed from State Court. (2) Proceedings initiated in state courts may be removed to the district courts under Title 28 U.S.C., Section 1441. When the petition for removal is granted, check this box.
 - Remanded from Appellate Court. (3) Check this box for cases remanded to the district court for further action. Use the date of remand as the filing date.
 - Reinstated or Reopened. (4) Check this box for cases reinstated or reopened in the district court. Use the reopening date as the filing date.
 - Transferred from Another District. (5) For cases transferred under Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1404(a). Do not use this for within district transfers or multidistrict litigation transfers.
 - Multidistrict Litigation. (6) Check this box when a multidistrict case is transferred into the district under authority of Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1407. When this box is checked, do not check (5) above.
 - VI. Cause of Action.** Report the civil statute directly related to the cause of action and give a brief description of the cause. **Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity.** Example: U.S. Civil Statute: 47 USC 553 Brief Description: Unauthorized reception of cable service
 - VII. Requested in Complaint.** Class Action. Place an "X" in this box if you are filing a class action under Rule 23, F.R.Cv.P.
 - Demand. In this space enter the actual dollar amount being demanded or indicate other demand, such as a preliminary injunction.
 - Jury Demand. Check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not a jury is being demanded.
 - VIII. Related Cases.** This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases, if any. If there are related pending cases, insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judge names for such cases.

Date and Attorney Signature. Date and sign the civil cover sheet.

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA
INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,)
)
)
Plaintiff,)
)
)
v.) Cause No. 1:18-cv-3903
)
)
\$42,600.00 UNITED STATES CURRENCY,)
)
)
Defendant.)

WARRANT FOR ARREST OF PROPERTY

TO: ANY OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE OF THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS a Complaint for Forfeiture In Rem has been filed in this Court on the 12th day of December, 2018, by Josh J. Minkler, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana, against Forty-Two Thousand Six Hundred Dollars and No Cents in United States Currency ("\$42,600.00"), defendant herein, for reasons and causes set forth in the Complaint;

YOU ARE HEREBY COMMANDED to take custody of and to deliver the defendant currency into the possession of the United States of America, to be detained in the possession of the United States or its designee until further order of this Court, and you will make return thereon not later than ten (10) days after execution of process.

Dated: _____

Laura A. Briggs, Clerk
United States District Court
Southern District of Indiana

Arrest Warrant to be issued by the Clerk pursuant to
Rule G(3)(b)(i) of the Supplemental Rules for
Admiralty or Maritime Claims and Asset Forfeiture Actions,
for property in custody of the United States.